The end of pan-Arab media? National, transnational media and identity in Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan after 2011

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Abstract

The article explores the relation between identity definition and trust in different information sources in Morocco, Jordan and Tunisia following the 2011 Uprisings. While prior to 2011 literature mostly highlighted the role of pan-Arab news channels in consolidating a transnational Arab public sphere, recent studies argued that there has been a reinforcement of national media and identities in the Middle East and North Africa, as a consequence of a partial liberalisation of national broadcasting. Our study is based on the Arab Transformations survey (2014), which unlike previous surveys included questions covering both media consumption and identity definition. We looked at how in the three countries the choice of Muslim, Arab or national identity definition was associated with the preference for distinct sources of political news. The results only partially confirmed the hypothesis of a renewed importance of national media and showed that in the three countries people tended to attribute very different values to the same news sources.

Keywords

Arab Uprisings, ethnic identity, information sources, Jordan, Morocco, national identity, religious identity, social media, transnational television, Tunisia

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Introduction

This article builds on the intersection of two fields of study – that of social and political identity definition and that of media consumption – to explore attitudes towards national and international news sources in three Arab countries following the 2011 Uprisings. Our analysis is based on data from Arab Transformations (AT), a survey carried out in 2014 in six Arab countries.[1] While previous surveys in the MENA region did not cover both domains of media consumption and identity definition, nor include detailed and comparable sets of questions, AT data allowed us to explore the two dimensions separately and their interaction. The article therefore aims at contributing to a research area which has rarely been supported by empirical data – with very few exceptions, such as Nisbet and Myers (2010) – by looking at the cases of Morocco, Jordan and Tunisia after 2011.

The nexus between media use and identity definition has been traditionally explored in relation to the building or reinforcement of national communities (Anderson, 1983; Habermas, 1989). Within the MENA region, the set-up of state broadcasting systems in the post-colonial era also served the nation-building process and the consolidation of authoritarian regimes (Ayish, 2002; Hafez, 2001; Rugh, 2004). However, since the end of the 1990s, the focus of most media scholars started to shift from the national to the transnational level of media production and consumption, as the rise of satellite television, first from Europe and then from the Gulf countries, broadened the choice of available channels in the region (Eickelman and Anderson, 1999; el-Nawaway and Iskandar, 2002; Lynch, 2006). The consolidation of a transnational Arab and Muslim identity in the MENA region in fact has often been associated with the growing visibility of pan-Arab satellite television since the 1990s (Cherribi, 2006; El Oifi, 2005), and later on with the rise of the digital media domain, from blogs to social networks (Allaoui and Kuebler, 2011; Faris, 2013; Lynch, 2007).

After 2011, however, the consolidation of a pan-Arab public and identity seems to have been interrupted. According to several observers, following the Uprisings the popularity of pan-Arab media started to decline, while at the same time new and old national broadcasters started to gain larger shares of the national audiences (Guaaybess, 2013; Kraidy, 2014; Mellor, 2013; Sarnelli and Kobibi, 2017). We tested this hypothesis with empirical data from the AT survey and found very different results in each of the three countries.

Among the six countries covered by the AT survey (Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq), we selected for the purpose of this study Tunisia, a republic going through a process of radical political transformation, and Morocco and Jordan, two authoritarian monarchies which resisted the 2011 ‘revolutionary wave’. We deliberately excluded countries which are undergoing a phase of authoritarian restoration (Egypt) or of civil war (Libya, Iraq), as their unstable condition would make it more difficult to explore and compare results.

The article aims therefore to confront some broader theoretical issues on media and identity in the MENA region with empirical data from the AT survey. Given the lack of previous equivalent data, we cannot compare our results with pre-2011 trends. However, we can discuss them in relation to the recent literature and suggest possible future investigations. We will also focus on the differences among age cohorts, given the importance often attributed to young people's role within the Uprisings (Howard and Hussain, 2011; Wilson and Dunn, 2011). Tables 5 and 6 in Appendix 1 provide the sample sizes and the main socio-demographic characteristics of the samples.

We tried to address the following questions: How are the post-2011 political and social changes in the three countries reflected by the preference for different information sources? What are the main definitions of identity chosen in the three countries? Is there a correlation between the preference for a certain identity definition and the trust in some information sources (national or international, traditional or digital)?

We argue that the combined analysis of news media choice and identity definition can offer a useful perspective on the relation between national and supranational identity in the light of the social and political transformations reshaping the MENA region. In particular, respondents in each country seem to attribute very different levels of trust to the same media sources even when choosing the same identity definition (Muslim, Arab, national identity). Against new and old forms of technological determinism – emphasising, in turn, the capacity of pan-Arab channels to encourage transnational solidarity, and of social media to promote political change – our data show that distinct national contexts can inform very different media choices, and reflect the post-2011 divergent political paths taken by Tunisia, Jordan and Morocco.

Media in Morocco, Jordan and Tunisia after 2011

After 2011, Tunisia started a gradual – although bumpy – ride towards democratic reforms; Morocco and Jordan, two monarchies, implemented some minor political reforms, with different degrees of support and participation, but their authoritarian structures managed to resist the 'revolutionary wave' which shook the region. These political differences are also somehow reflected in the three countries' media systems.

Moroccan media before and after 2011

The state monopoly on broadcasting in Morocco was lifted in 2002, but the process of media liberalisation that followed was 'an incoherent one' (El Issawi, 2012). Currently Morocco has nine domestic television channels, of which seven are government owned, one is private and one is of mixed ownership. Television, therefore, is still a symbol of the regime's sovereignty, while liberalisation was mostly confined to radio: there are 18 private radio stations today (El Issawi, 2012; Zaid and Ibahrine, 2011). The government announced the awarding of new television licenses in 2012, but the reform has stalled since then. Press law in Morocco explicitly prohibits criticism of the monarchy and Islam, and effectively bars criticism of other taboo subjects (Freedom House, 2015b).

Following the 2011 protests, the monarchy promoted a constitutional reform, also reinforcing the freedom of the press. However, the gap between written principles and unwritten practices continues to be evident. Several trials to journalists have recently been based on charges like 'threatening state security' or 'failing to report foreign financing'. Particularly terrorism-related investigations, Western Sahara and the reputation of King Mohammed VI continue to form 'grey areas' that can land reporters in prison (Freedom House, 2015b).

Tunisian media before and after 2011

Following a series of reforms, the media system in Tunisia saw significant openings after 2011. However, the new institutional framework is still 'subject to the inconsistencies and difficulties of a post-revolutionary transition period' (Ghazali, 2015: 3).

Television in Tunisia was opened to the private sector in 2003, but what took place, as in other fields, was a liberalisation mainly promoting the ruling clan's interests. As a result, until 2011, many dissident channels, such as El Hiwar Ettounsi, were broadcasting from abroad to escape government control. After the Revolution, though, this and other channels relocated to Tunisia, switching from satellite to terrestrial and becoming mainstream national channels. In 2014, the new Independent Broadcasting Authority granted licenses to more than 20 new outlets, although some of them later dissolved. Tunisia's new constitution, adopted in January 2014, also contained numerous protections for media independence. However, the charter also left in force some remnants of the Ben Ali era, such as possible arbitrary restrictions on journalists, or charges of defamation. Moreover, the legacy of Tunisia's

authoritarian system is still present in the media system in the form of financial, political and security constraints (Ghazali, 2015; Lynch, 2015), and journalists continue to operate in difficult professional conditions (El Issawi, 2012). Nevertheless, compared to the pre-2011 scenario, the result is a much greater diversity of political voices.

Jordan media before and after 2011

Also in Jordan a series of media reforms were introduced well before the 2011 Uprisings – in 1997, 1998 and 2004 – but the current media environment still seems to be very 'vulnerable to political interference' (Murphy, 2011: 967). State-owned Jordan Radio and TV had until recently almost no competitors for the coverage of national political issues, given the extra financial surcharge required to private broadcasters wishing to cover such topics. In September 2012, the Audiovisual Commission lifted these fees on political content, although the state continued to keep its control through less formal restraints (Sweis and Baslan, 2013: 29).

In 2011, Jordanian youth activists, like their counterparts in Tunisia and Egypt, organised their political initiatives mostly through social media (Ryan, 2011: 573). After that, an increasing amount of control measures targeted the online media sector. The 2012 Press Law introduced the requirement for news websites to obtain expensive licenses from the state. Following this provision, some 300 news websites were blocked by the government, as they failed to adhere to new registration and licensing provisions. In 2014, new amendments to the antiterrorism law also included restrictions on freedom of speech related to national security issues, resulting in the arrest or intimidation of several journalists and activists (Freedom House, 2015a).

A changing regional mediascape?

Overall, the 2011 protests had a significant effect on the regional media environment, and introduced or emphasised some important differences among MENA countries. Several authors noticed a return to a national perspective (Guaaybess, 2013; Mellor, 2013; Sarnelli and Kobibi, 2017) or 'a renaissance of national broadcasting' (Kraidy, 2014) following the Uprisings. This process coincided with the decreasing popularity and credibility of pan-Arab broadcasters like Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera, despite the fundamental role they played during the protests in Tunisia and Egypt in connecting online and offline protesters (Sarnelli, 2013). In fact, it seems that when further revolts in other countries were met with violent government repression and ultimately resulted in civil wars, the mistrust towards these outlets started to increase, as their coverage 'degenerated into an arena for regional power struggles' (Lynch, 2015: 93), despite some important exceptions (like the successful 'Al Hadath' news channel launched by Al Arabiya network in 2012). In the following paragraphs we will confront the 'national broadcasting renaissance' hypothesis with empirical data from Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan.

Main sources of political information: Questions from the AT survey

One of the questions in the AT questionnaire was 'what are the main sources of political information for you?' (see Table 7, Appendix 1). Respondents could indicate more than one option, choosing from traditional media (newspapers, radio, television), digital media and telecommunication (internet, email, text messages, social media) and 'offline social media' (friends and colleagues, public spaces, word of mouth). For newspapers, radio and television, the list also included a further differentiation among national state-funded, national private and international outlets. This distinction allowed us to test the hypothesis of the new relevance of national media that according to some observers characterised the aftermath of

the 2011 revolts.
Our focus on sources of political information, instead of information in general, was motivated by the generally stronger alignment of political information between nationalist and internationalist, or pro- and anti-government perspectives.
These sources are also the ones which are first targeted by national authorities in times of crisis, to influence public opinion and gather support around new government policies.
Before and after AT, other surveys such as World Values Survey (WVS), Arab Barometer and Afro Barometer investigated the frequency of use of different information sources in the MENA region, each of them using a different list of media.[2] In all these cross-sectional surveys, the data collection is carried out using a common questionnaire, translated into Arabic and its local variants.[1] While Arab Barometer asks about sources of political news, the other two surveys consider only generic sources of news. The different formulation of the question might affect the respondents' interpretation, as one could prefer different sources for different contents (e.g., the internet for political news and television for 'soft news').
Moreover, unlike AT, investigating the preferred sources, the other surveys refer to the frequency of use – which in many cases could be affected by coverage and access to the media sources. The question on preference, instead, allows a focus on the choice of the respondent.
Furthermore, the question on trust in media sources, based on the same list of options, allowed us to explore also how the public reacted to the reforms targeting both traditional and digital media. In contrast, other surveys did not include questions on trust in the media (Afro Barometer) or only consider traditional media such as newspapers and television (WVS).
Arab Barometer's last waves included a detailed section on media, with questions on frequency, trust and purposes of use of media sources; however, the fact that frequency of use is preferred to choice, and even more that social media are not considered, makes these data less useful.
Apart from comparing the results from the three countries, we also looked at cross-generational comparisons. Most of the recent debate on media in the MENA region focused in fact on generational differences, and particularly on how Arab youth used social media during the 2011 protests (Hoffman and Jamal, 2012; Howard and Hussain, 2011). Several studies also analysed critically the emergence of digital-based citizen journalism in the region (Onodera, 2011; Sreberny and Khiabany, 2010), although this phenomenon is beyond the scope of our study. In general, the definition of 'youth' adopted by most literature is often controversial (Murphy, 2012; Wilson and Dunn, 2011). The dynamic of the protests in Tunisia and Egypt suggests that the most active offline and online protesters ranged from teenagers to young adults. As Chouikha (2015) suggested for Tunisia, the relation between the 'media activists' of the 1999-2000 and the 'cyber-dissidents' of the 2000-2011 was defined by continuity, not rupture, despite some important differences between the two generations. For the purpose of our analysis the age of the respondents was coded into three groups, following a classification already adopted for the AT report on youth and social media (Vincent et al., 2016). Following this classification, 'young' were defined as respondents between 18 and 35 years old – according to the hypothesis of a 'delayed transition' to adulthood caused by social and economic blockages (Dhillion and Yousef, 2009) – while respondents between 36 and 55 were the 'middle-aged', and those aged 56 or more were included in the oldest group.

News sources in Morocco

Main sources of political information in Morocco

The main difference among age groups in Morocco, based on AT data, seemed to concern the preference of internet-based media over other sources of political information (Table 1). This value was much higher for the youngest generation, but also a third of the 36-55 age group indicated the same preference. According to recent investigations, the number of internet users in Morocco grew by an estimated 60% from 2005 to 2010, although access is still limited mostly to urban areas and to educated segments of the population (Zaid and Ibahrine, 2011).

One distinctive element of the Moroccan media landscape is the popularity that radio stations enjoy among all age groups. One major reason for the success of the

Table 1. Mentioned sources of political news by age groups, Morocco (%).

	18-35	36-55	56+
Newspaper			
Government newspapers	22.6	22	14.3
Private national newspapers	23.5	23.7	20
International newspapers	11.2	11.4	10.3
TV			
Government TV	38.3	36.1	46.9
Private national TV	34.2	38.9	35.4
International TV	49.6	45.4	38.9
Radio			
Government radio	19	19.7	28.6
Private national radio	22	21.7	22.3
International radio	23.2	23.8	22.9
Internet and new media			
Internet	46.7	29.3	15.4
Email	7.6	5.3	2.9
Text messages	5.6	4.3	2.9
Social media	19	13.6	8
Other			
Friends and colleagues	23.7	18.2	22.3
Public places	16.3	16.1	20
Word of mouth	15.7	11.3	13.1

private radio stations launched after 2002 is the choice of a language which, compared to the more formal language of state media, is closer to everyday Moroccan Arabic, creating an image of a young and dynamic medium also through the use of social networks pages (Miller, 2012: 27; Zaid and Ibahrine, 2011: 6). As for the newspapers, their relatively high popularity compared to the other two countries can be seen as the legacy of a phase of greater independence of the press which started with the reign of Mohammed VI (1999), although it was again reduced shortly after by the introduction of new forms of government control (Baylocq and Granci, 2012: 12).
The youngest and the oldest generation seem to make quite different choices also in terms of television channels. While almost 47% of the over-56 group expressed a preference for national television, about 49% of the 18-35 group indicated international channels as their main source.
In sum, despite the delayed liberalisation of the television sector, and therefore the limited role of national independent channels, three years after 2011 the media landscape in Morocco seemed to include a plurality of media and formats, providing space for a political debate which was not appeased by the constitutional reforms (Bennafla and Seniguer, 2011).

Trust in national/international television in Morocco

In Morocco, not only the preference for, but also the reputation of international news channels was considerably higher than that of national channels, especially for the first two age groups (Figure 1). The limited trust in national channels could

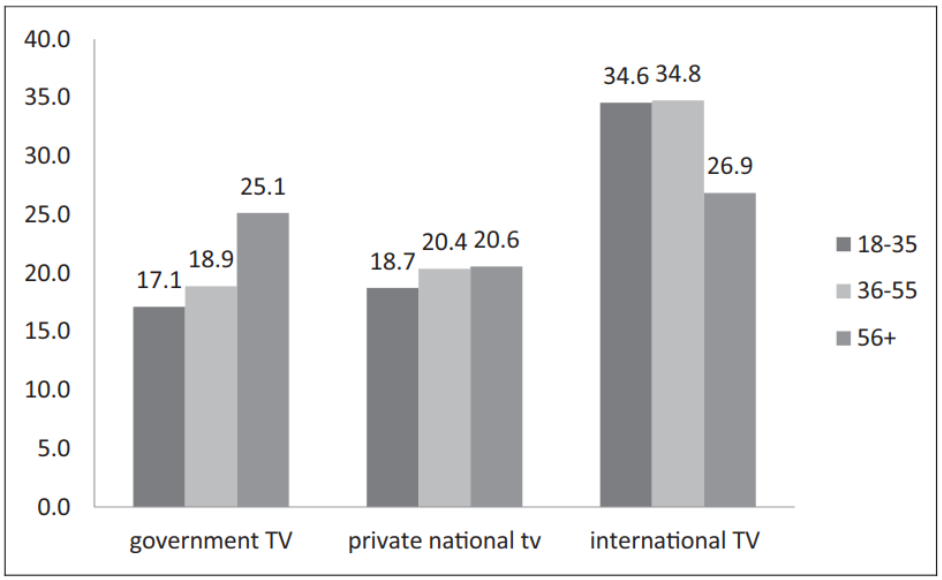

Figure 1. Trust in TV as source of political information by age groups, Morocco (%).

be related to the persisting hold the monarchy has on the sector, particularly with the public service stations, 2M and Al Oula (Zaid and Ibahrine, 2011: 7).
Government-owned national television seems to be challenged both by local and transnational outlets also in terms of language and formats, as it is still mostly characterised by the use of formal Arabic or formal French (Zaid and Ibahrine, 2011: 8), unlike the private local alternatives (Miller, 2012: 16), and does not offer the benefits of a more independent coverage provided by satellite channels.

News sources in Tunisia

Main information sources in Tunisia

The preference for internet-based media appeared to be quite high among young people but also relatively high among other age groups in Tunisia. Among internet-based media and telecommunications, social media were by far the most important source for political news in the country (Table 2), in line with previous findings from a 2010 survey (Touati, 2012: 8).

Table 2. Mentioned sources of political news by age groups, Tunisia (%).

	18-35	36-55	56+
Newspaper			
Government newspapers	8.5	14.7	12.1
Private national newspapers	24.3	28.4	18.3
International newspapers	11.3	12.5	12.8
TV			
Government TV	25.4	29.8	25.3
Private national TV	61.4	65.7	63.3
International TV	43.9	44.9	38.1
Radio			
Government radio	19.1	21.3	19.4
Private national radio	40.8	45.4	49.1
International radio	12.9	12.3	9.7
Internet and new media			
Internet	38	13.2	9.3
Email	7.6	3.3	2.4
Text messages	3.8	2.6	2.1
Social media	33.6	14.7	6.9
Other			
Friends and colleagues	30.4	22.5	22.8
Public places	11.7	12.1	8.7
Word of mouth	9.1	11.3	8.3

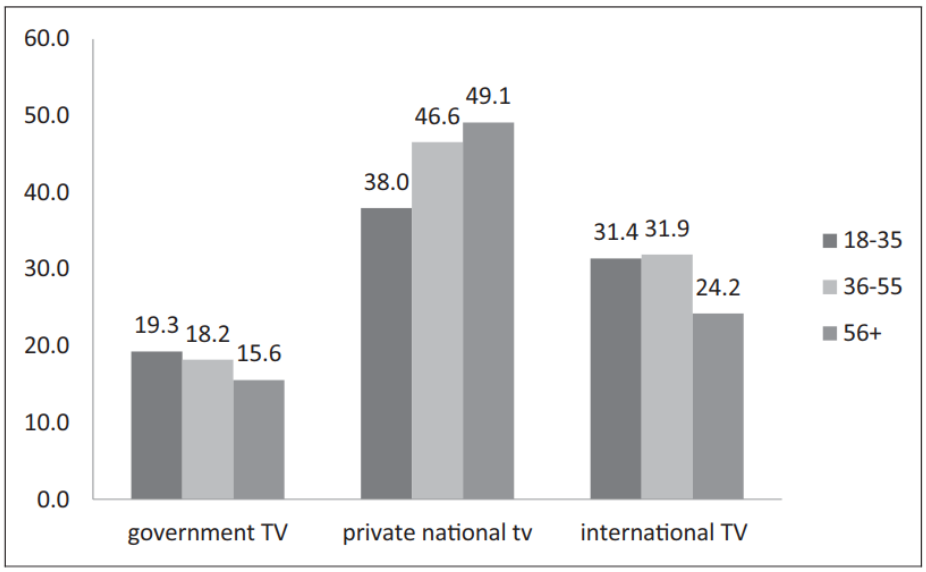

Figure 2. Trust in TV as source of political information by age groups, Tunisia (%).

Another distinctive aspect emerging from the Tunisian data is the distribution of the preferences in the television domain, following the post-revolutionary reforms. The popularity of state-funded television in Tunisia is in fact much lower than in Morocco and Jordan and is largely surpassed by the preference for private national channels. International television channels and private radio stations also score higher than state channels.
As for the press sector, post-revolutionary changes also included the creation of new magazines and newspapers, and the disappearance of others connected with the old ruling party (Touati, 2012: 6). Also in this case, the new private sector seems to have met the approval of the public.

Trust in national/international television in Tunisia

The high number of respondents indicating trust in private channels seems to confirm the relevance of the post-revolutionary reforms in Tunisia, even though for the youngest generation the trust in transnational channels is also very high (Figure 2). These two types of TV channels are probably associated with different sets of qualities. While transnational satellite channels have a consolidated (although at times controversial) reputation for professionalism and independence, the new post-revolutionary channels are highly heterogeneous in terms of both form and content. As underlined by Amamou (2016), these channels finally reflect the composition, and the internal divisions, of Tunisian society, after the previous regime tried for decades to 'even out' its mediated representation (Amamou, 2016: 11). After an initial revolutionary crisis, it seems however that the reformed state-funded television might already be regaining its audience share: in a 2012 national poll, the evening newscast of Al Wataniya 1 was again the most popular (Amamou, 2016: 12). Although this new positive trend for state-funded television is not evident from AT data, both state-funded and private national channels in Tunisia are surely experimenting with new ways to get closer to their audience, based on popular entertainment programmes but also on the style and reliability of their newscasts.

News sources in Jordan

Main sources of information in Jordan

Also in Jordan, the gap in the preference for internet-based sources between the younger generation and the other groups is quite substantial. However, for all the age groups, television appears to be the main source of political information, with an almost equal distribution among state-funded, private and international channels (Table 3).
Although the proportion of the population that regularly accesses the internet in Jordan has risen significantly in the last few years,[3] access remains limited

Table 3. Mentioned sources of political news by age groups, Jordan (%).

	18-35	36-55	56+
Newspaper			
Government newspapers	16.9	16.7	17.7
Private national newspapers	5.9	7.6	7.3
International newspapers	3.8	2.9	3.6
TV			
Government TV	41.9	49.6	51.7
Private national TV	39.4	52	56.4
International TV	41.1	54.8	53.5
Radio			
Government radio	8.4	9.9	8.3
Private national radio	5.3	7.5	8.1
International radio	3.3	3.7	4.9
Internet and new media			
Internet	37.3	20.3	8.8
Email	0.9	0.4	0.5
Text messages	1.2	0.4	0.3
Social media	7	3.5	2.9
Other			
Friends and colleagues	16.7	16.7	19.7
Public places	3.7	4.4	8.1
Word of mouth	12	12.7	13

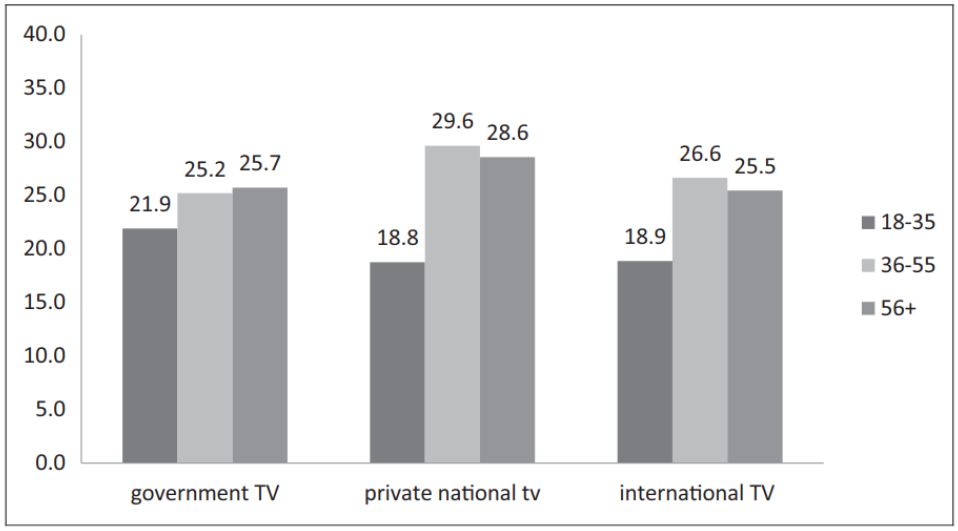

Figure 3. Trust in TV as source of political information by age groups, Jordan (%).

especially in rural areas (Pies and Madanat, 2011; Sweis and Baslan, 2013). Moreover, the fact that online media became the main target for new repressive government policies after 2011 also helped television to remain 'the only universal medium in Jordan' (Sweis and Baslan, 2013: 6).

Despite the persisting government hold on broadcasting, though, national television is going through a phase of gradual transformations. On the one hand, a few national private channels, such as Roya TV and Nourmina TV, were introduced in the last few years and, according to a recent investigation, are already perceived by the public as more professional than state television (Sweis and Baslan, 2013: 28). On the other hand, the decade before 2011 saw regional satellite channels becoming increasingly popular in the country (Pies and Madanat, 2011). Because of this national and international competition, JRTV started to focus more on localised reporting (Sweis and Baslan, 2013: 7). AT data also show that radio and newspapers enjoy a limited popularity, and that for newspapers preference is given to the government ones, probably due to the legal and economic barriers still faced by independent outlets.

Trust in national/international television in Jordan

State, private and international television channels in Jordan reach almost the same score also in terms of trust, although a slight preference for the private national channels suggests that some form of change might be taking place (Figure 3). For the time being, though, the government reaffirmed its tight control on the sector on more than one occasion. In 2012 for example, Josat TV, one of the few private competitors, lost its license over opinions expressed by a guest during a programme, and was charged with 'inciting against the regime' and 'undermining the king's dignity' (Sweis and Baslan, 2013: 8). Such legal repressive measures have been combined with extra-legal interventions, starting with the closing of Al Jazeera's office in 2002, and continuing with violent attacks on journalists during the 2011 demonstrations.

As a result, citizens tend to associate the media with government control. Among the institutions which 'absolutely cannot criticise the government', listed in a 2008 survey, the media – including the internet – received the highest score (71%), revealing a generalised distrust towards the sector (Pies and Madanat, 2011: 6). In the same survey, 38% of Jordanians considered state television to be reliable for local news, where it holds a quasi-monopoly, but only 9% considered it to be trustworthy for international political news, in which it faces competition from pan-Arab channels (Pies and Madanat, 2011: 6). Although AT data do not allow us to measure such differences, it is likely that similar patterns have continued after 2011, even considering a rise of national private competitors.

Ethnic, religious or national identity?

Defining social, political and mediated identity

While in the past it was more common to think about the concept of identity as a crystallised dimension of the human being, nowadays it is generally assumed to be a dynamic concept, resulting from the interaction between subjective perceptions and external features. The individual's identity is forged from early childhood in an ongoing development through the various phases of life, an evolving process of 'becoming' (Peek, 2005). The individual concept of the self is connected with social structure through mechanisms of belonging that define one's social identity. This sense of belonging constitutes therefore a relevant aspect of identity development which starts within the primary groups (family) and then continues with other significant groups during a lifetime. Feelings of belonging to a nation, ethnicity or religion are broadly recognised as extremely significant as markers of both group and individual identity (Verkuyten and Yildiz, 2007). While the national identity dimension reflects a connection with territory and is frequently associated with civic and political belonging, ethnicity and religion provide a group's members with a shared cultural worldview, offering a

base for values, norms, beliefs and practices. National, religious and ethnic identities are therefore all incorporated in the multidimensional individual identity. As Stryker and Serpe (1994) argued, these different aspects can be organised according to a salience hierarchy. Depending on the circumstances, one of these identities may be more relevant in a specific cultural setting, defined not only by traditions but also by political choices and relations with other groups (Howard, 2000). Governments' policies, as well as media coverage, can therefore affect this hierarchy.

Mass media have long been associated with the emergence and reinforcement of national communities, in parallel with the birth of the modern nation state (Anderson, 1983; Habermas, 1989; Schlesinger, 2000). Among different media forms, television has often been considered particularly influential in the process of national identity formation (Curran, 2002; Price, 1995). More specifically, the persisting significance of national television news for national audiences has been confirmed by recent studies (Aalberg et al., 2013; Riegert, 2011). On the other hand, internet-based media have been related since the beginning to the emergence of a global public sphere, based on the dematerialised social interactions supported by digital technologies (Castells, 1996; Sassen, 2003). Despite the enduring importance of the intersections between physical and digital spaces (Lovink, 2013; Morley, 2000), satellite television and the internet have surely contributed to reshape the relation between political communities, territories and identities. Within a broader global media environment, in fact, digital media do not only nourish pre-existing communities but they also contribute to the establishment of new ‘de-territorialised’ ones (Jansson, 1999) and therefore potentially encourage more ‘cosmopolitan’ attitudes (Chalaby, 2005; Norris and Inglehart, 2009; Verboord, 2017).

This expansion of transnational communications has often been discussed in the case of the MENA region as a factor reinforcing a Muslim and/or Arab identity (Cherribi, 2006; Lynch, 2006). Before the recent growth in internet and social media use in the region, the rise of transnational identity had been related to the launch of the first generation of satellite news channels (Ayish, 2002; el-Nawaway and Iskandar, 2002; Hafez, 2001; Rugh, 2004). Despite the frequent association between the growth of regional media and the changing perception of collective identity, however, there is a lack of empirical studies connecting the two domains, with a very few exceptions, such as that of Nisbet and Myers (2010). In their study, based on survey data collected between 2004 and 2008, they found that increased exposure to transnational media was associated with more respondents identifying themselves as Muslims or Arabs rather than with their nation state (Nisbet and Myers, 2010: 355-358). However, the study only considered transnational television and did not include the growing sector of online-based media; and, most importantly, the dataset on which the study is based is not fully accessible, not allowing for a proper comparison over time.

For limits of space and purpose the following paragraphs will cover only the preference of new and old media in relation with the perceived identity definition three years after the 2011 Uprisings. We will look first at the hierarchy among different identity definitions in the three countries, and then at how the dimension of identity can be related with different degrees of trust in various news sources.

Identity definition in Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan

Cross-national surveys can be a valuable instrument to study the relation between media preference, trust and identity because they also allow comparisons across countries. However, not all the main cross-sectional surveys collect information with the same level of detail. AT is in fact the only survey, among those explored so far, that allowed us to study possible relations between identity definition and the consumption and trust of media. Other

surveys that collect information globally (like WVS) or in the MENA region (Arab Barometer or Afro Barometer) do not explore both these aspects or cover the MENA countries (as in the case of the International Social Survey Programme).
As we saw above, individual identity is a complex and multidimensional concept. This concept is often investigated in general population surveys mainly considering geographical and/or religious and/or ethnic identity. In most of the cases, information about these dimensions is collected through different questions. However, to study the possible relation between the choice of specific media and a particular dimension of identity it is necessary for these different dimensions to be presented to the respondents as competing alternatives. This is the case for AT's question, where the available options were as follows: (1) Your country of origin; (2) Arab (Ethnicity); (3) Muslim (Religion); (4) Region; (5) Local community, place where you live; (6) Other (see Table 8 in Appendix 1). For the purpose of this analysis, we collapsed the fourth and fifth option together, as they both indicated a form of belonging to sub-national areas, and both obtained a limited amount of preferences from the respondents in all the countries.
A few but significant differences emerged from the answers from Morocco, Jordan and Tunisia (Figure 4). In all of them, the prevalent dimension was the national identity, followed by the religious one. However, while Morocco and Jordan are almost similar in their distribution, in Tunisia people seemed to consider their religious identity less important.
As most of the previous surveys do not allow for the establishment of a proper hierarchy between competing identity definitions, it is almost impossible to draft a longitudinal trend, and to explore possible changes following the 2011 events. Some indications, however, can be drawn from the results of the Annual Arab

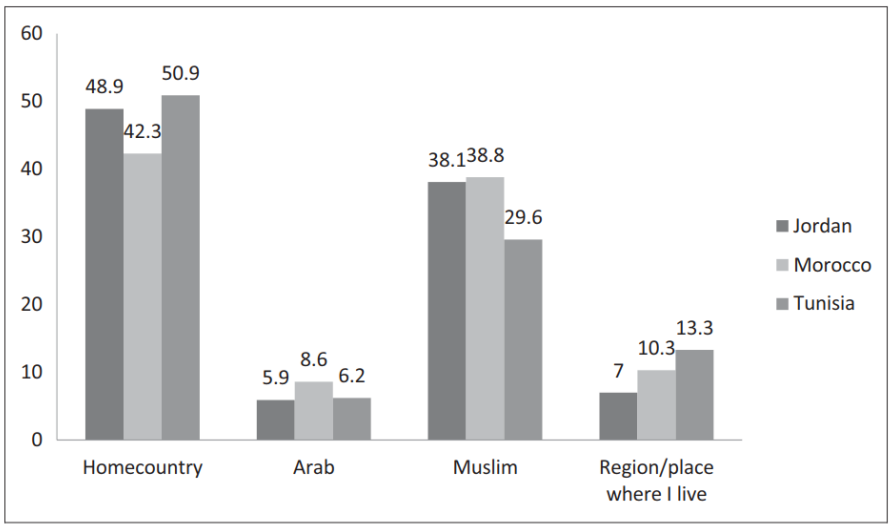

Figure 4. Do you identify yourself with... (%) by country.

Table 4. Identity definition in six Arab countries according to the Annual Arab Public Opinion Poll (Telhami, 2010).

Identity definition (average of six countries)	2008	2009	2010	2011	Jordan, 2010	Morocco, 2010
Muslim	36	32	39	31	15	64
Home country	39	35	32	33	53	20
Arab	20	32	25	26	21	4
Citizen of the world	4	1	4	9	11	11

Public Opinion Poll (Telhami, 2010), the same survey programme referred to by Nisbet and Myers (2010). These results (shown in Table 4), though, are only provided at the aggregate level, as the average resulting from six very different countries (Egypt, UAE, Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan, KSA) with the exception of the 2010 wave. While the overall picture appears quite flat, by looking at specific countries such as Morocco and Jordan (Table 4) it is clear that the situation differs greatly from one national context to another. Just as in 2014, national identity was the most salient dimension for the Jordanians in 2010 (Figure 4). However, the preference for a transnational Arab identity has decreased since then, the number of people giving primacy to their religious identity more than doubled in 2014. In Morocco, the change goes the other way. While the difference in the salience given to Arab identity does not present noticeable differences, those who identify themselves with their home country doubled in 2014. Muslim identity, instead, dramatically dropped from 64 to 38.3%.

These differences should be taken only as a general orientation, as not only the questions but also the sampling strategies adopted for the two surveys were quite different: while the Arab Public Opinion Poll used representative samples of great cities in each country, AT also covered rural areas (Abbott et al., 2016). In addition, the Annual Arab Public Opinion Poll did not cover Tunisia.

Trust in different information sources and identity definition

We tried to investigate how the preferred identity definitions in the three countries could be associated with trust in different information sources. More specifically, we wanted to explore whether the choice of one of the options of identity definition included in the AT questionnaire had any positive or negative correlation with trust in one kind of information source. The only recent example of such correlation is the already mentioned study by Nisbet and Myers (2010), which concluded that a higher exposure to pan-Arab news channels corresponded to a higher probability of respondents identifying themselves as Arabs or Muslims rather than preferring their national identity. Instead of considering exposure to certain media, we chose the measure of trust in information sources, as it seems to be a more reliable indicator of people's values and their attitudes towards these sources. For the

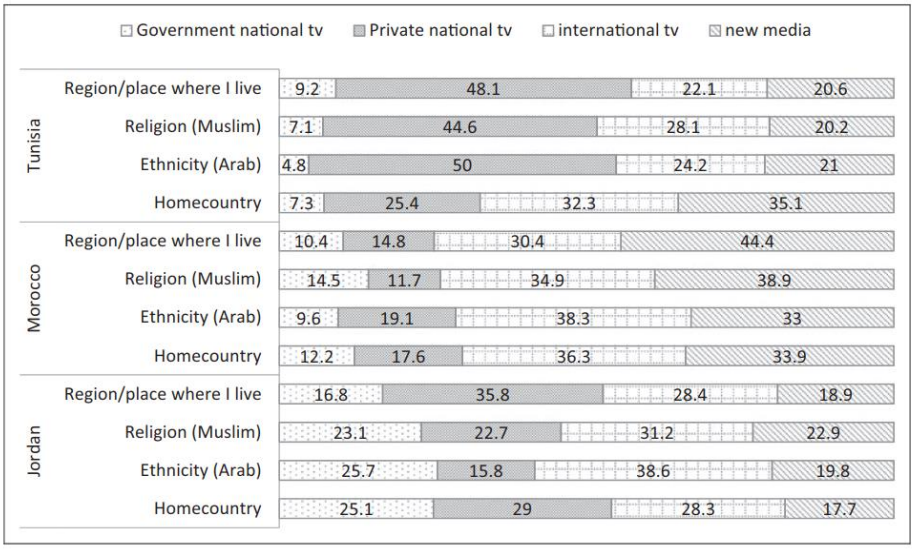

Figure 5. Self-definition of identity and trusted source of political information by country.

purpose of this investigation, we considered the whole national samples, and selected the most popular media options among the ones included in the AT questionnaire: national private TV, government-owned TV, international TV and new media (including both internet and social networks). In what follows, we will point out some of the results of this combination in Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan, by focusing on the difference among Muslim (1), Arab (2) or national (3) identity which were the most popular choices in the three countries.

1. *Preference for Muslim identity*. In Tunisia, 29.6% of the people identified themselves as Muslims (Figure 4). As displayed in Figure 5, almost half of this share (44.6%) trusted private national channels, less than one-third trusted international television and one-fifth the new media. Only a small portion (7.1%) expressed trust in national channels. This distribution could be explained by the fact that among the new channels born after 2011, several express religious views. More generally, this also shows that the preference for a religious identity dimension does not necessarily imply a detachment from the national political sphere – in fact, the party winning the first post-revolutionary elections in 2011 was the moderate religious party Ennahda.
   In Morocco, the respondents identifying themselves as Muslims are 38.8% of the whole Moroccan sample (Figure 4) and, compared to the Tunisian, showed a different distribution in their trust in the sources of information (Figure 5). Most of them (38.9%) trusted new media and international televisions (34.9%). The governmental national channels did not find a big support among this group (only 14.5%), and even less did the private ones (11.7%). This might indicate that respondents identifying themselves as Muslims in Morocco might not feel well represented by the 'institutional' religious organisations (such as the Islamist conservative democrat party PJD, ruling party at the time of the survey) and consequently by the national (state-owned, or partially private) television channels. By contrast, transnational channels offer a popular alternative, and the new media domain showed to be an even more conducive platform for independent local initiatives.
   In Jordan, people identifying as Muslims (38.1% of the Jordan sample, see Figure 4) seem also to trust mostly international television (31.3%, as shown in Figure 5). Private national televisions and new media are considered trustful sources by a similar share of people (22.7 and 22.9%), while 23.1% expressed trust in national channels. Muslims in

Jordan, as a political category, are often part of opposition parties and organisations, such as the Islamic Action Front, which generally represent the views of the Palestinian Jordanians, and tend to have a rather tense relationship with the monarchy (Ryan, 2011). In this sense, it might be that Muslim identity in Jordan is associated with a higher trust of transnational channels as they best represent a dispersed community such as the Palestinian one.

2. *Preference for Arab identity*. For the small group of respondents identifying themselves as Arabs (only 8.6% in Tunisia; 5.9% in Morocco; 6.2% in Jordan), one could have expected to find a higher level of trust in the transnational, pan-Arab news channels. However, while this is the case in Jordan and in Morocco, it is certainly not so in Tunisia. As shown in Figure 5, most of the Moroccans and Jordanians belonging to this group (respectively, 38.3 and 38.6%), expressed trust mostly in international televisions, while this share among the Tunisian is relatively quite low (24.2%). Surely, the feeling of belonging to a given community does not necessarily imply a higher level of trust in the media which are considered the most representative of that community, as people might disagree on these media's language or representations. Still, there is a wide consensus among scholars and media analysts on the role played by pan-Arab news channels in the past 20 years in bolstering and promoting a new kind of pan-Arab cultural and social identity. This process also probably contributed to building a regional base for the shared grievances that resulted in the 2011 revolts. In this sense, the limited popularity of the pan-Arab channels in 2014, even among the respondents identifying themselves as 'Arabs', might confirm the mistrust in pan-Arab channels which followed their ambiguous coverage of the 'less successful' 2011 protests, such as those in Bahrain, in Libya and Syria (Lynch, 2015). At the same time, it could also suggest the emergence of new national priorities in the aftermath of the revolts, which cannot be covered by transnational media but need to be told by 'local' voices. This could be in particular the case for Tunisia and Jordan where national channels (private and governmental) are considered trustful by about half of the subgroups who identify themselves with their ethnicity.
3. *Preference for national identity*. Finally, if we look at the respondents who chose to identify themselves by their nationality (as shown in Figure 4: 42.3% of the Tunisians; 48.9% of the Moroccans; 50.9% of the Jordanians), one could expect to find a positive correlation with trust in national (state-funded) channels, but this does not happen in any of the three countries. In general, state-funded national television does not seem to enjoy high popularity (as displayed in Figure 5: only 7.3% in Tunisia and 12.2% in Morocco), with the partial exception of Jordan (25.1%). This exception could be due to the persisting dominant position of state television in the country, and the obstacles still faced by independent competitors, although the slight advantage of private television channels registered by the AT survey might indicate that some opening-up of the news environment is finally happening. Interestingly, in Tunisia, people choosing national identity are also the ones trusting mostly new media (35.1%) and transnational television (32.1%). This could be a consequence of the 'revolutionary' nationalism which supported the 2011 protests, and which still does not recognise the newly launched national television channels as reliable options when compared with the more established transnational sources, or the more independent online networks. A similar picture emerges also from Morocco, where trust in transnational television is even higher

compared with Tunisia (36.3% versus 32.3%), while is lower the trust in private national channels (17.6%, compared to the share in Tunisia – 25.4%, and Jordan – 29%), given the very limited amount of independent options available in the country.

These data overall point towards the apparent paradox of contrasting values characterising the relation between identity definition and trust in media sources in Morocco, Jordan and Tunisia. However, from these results we can draw a series of useful indications. First of all, the data show the importance of considering, in any media analysis, the impact of recent political trajectories, which for the region considered resulted in a fragmented and profoundly differentiated mediascape rather than in a more homogeneous pan-Arab media space. Second, this fragmentation seems to show the limits of 'technological determinist' media theories, and their recurring tendency to overestimate the importance of one single media form – e.g., satellite channels at the end of the 1990s, blogs at the beginning of the new millennium and social media after 2011 – in relation to political and social changes. Rather, our data reveal composite media systems in which different values can be attributed to specific technologies depending on the political, social and cultural context. In this sense, the provocative question posed by our title remains open, as what emerges is a picture made of distinct and meaningful media recombinations – small and big, regional and local, old and new – in each of the countries considered (as already partially anticipated in Sarnelli (2013, 2014)).

Conclusions

We looked at the preference for diverse information sources in Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan, and at how these choices reflect the different social and political environments of the three countries in the aftermath of the 2011 events. In Tunisia, the post-revolutionary reforms allowed for the creation of a variety of new voices in the domain of traditional media. However, the post-revolutionary system is still quite unstable, and some of its features might be only temporary. In Morocco, the limited reforms approved by the government in the political sphere did not have an equivalent in the news media environment. Therefore, there seems to be still a significant division between the media outlets that are perceived as more independent (online media, international television, local radio stations) and the ones under direct government control (state-funded and private national television). Finally, in Jordan, the online news domain seems to be the one that suffered the most from a series of repressive government measures following the 2011 protests. As a result, when the survey was carried out (2014) online news media were not perceived as a strong alternative to national television. At the same time, the credibility slowly gained by private national channels could increasingly challenge the dominant position of the government-owned channels. This variety of national results does not point towards a new possible trend in the whole MENA region, but rather towards national differences reflecting – and at the same time shaping – the post-2011 changes on several levels.

We started from the hypothesis of a 'resurgence' of national media in the MENA area and of a decline in popularity of the pan-Arab channels following the 2011 Uprisings (Guaaybess, 2013; Kraidy, 2014; Lynch, 2015; Mellor, 2013; Sarnelli and Kobibi, 2017). To test this hypothesis, we compared the data on trust in state, private and international television channels in each country. Among the countries considered, a clear rise in the popularity of national news sources emerged only in Tunisia, given the growth of national independent outlets which followed the revolution. A more limited increase in the popularity of national

independent channels was visible also in Jordan, but still very much susceptible to the limitations imposed by the government. In Morocco, liberalisation of the television sector continues to be delayed, not allowing for the emergence of independent national alternatives. The popularity of pan-Arab broadcasters, in effect, was not particularly high in the three countries, with the partial exception of Morocco. This could possibly confirm the hypothesis that the reputation of these channels has been damaged by their uneven coverage of the 2011 protests. However, it could also simply indicate that the current regional fragmentation is better represented by local voices, reflecting divergent national priorities.

In this sense, it seems that the current phase is characterised more by different combinations of new and existing information sources, acquiring a different value in each national context, rather than by the dominance of one media technology contributing to a specific political phase, as it has been often argued for the satellite channels first and more recently for the social media.

We also combined the results of the main identity definitions (Arab, Muslim, national identity) with the trust in different information sources (national government TV, national private TV, international TV, online media). Based on AT survey data, we found that the relation between identity definition and trust in different information sources also varies notably from country to country, with the case of Tunisia breaking the most with the pre-2011 context, given the extent of the post-revolutionary transformations in the country.

In general, while previous studies found a positive correlation between exposure to transnational television and choice of Arab and Muslim identity definition (Nisbet and Myers, 2010) our results, although only partially comparable, seem to indicate that this is no more the case in the post-2011 scenario. In fact, the respondents identifying themselves as Muslims tended to express a higher degree of trust in national television in Tunisia and in online media in Morocco, while only in Jordan did they indicate a preference for transnational television. At the same time, identification with the home country was matched by higher trust in online media in Tunisia, with transnational television in Morocco, and with similar levels of national and transnational television in Jordan. If a common pattern emerges, therefore, it is that of a further differentiation of national media systems after the Uprisings. In fact, despite the difficulties in comparing our data with previous surveys, another factor emerging from our analysis is the resurgence of national identities in the post-2011 era, compared to transnational identities (Arab, Muslim) in the region, which is perhaps not surprising given the profoundly different trajectories experienced by MENA countries after the Uprisings. This indicates once again the importance of local settings which can inform the attribution of different value to various media formats, depending on how they are perceived by groups in relation to their national, ethnic or cultural identity. Following the literature on new media and cosmopolitanism (Chalaby, 2005; Norris and Inglehart, 2009; Verboord, 2017), digital media are often expected to offer a cosmopolitan alternative to traditional national media. However, our data showed that the preference for digital news sources in countries like Tunisia or Morocco can actually correspond to a stronger identification with national and religious identities.

This phase seems thus to be characterised by new tensions, or rather by a new form of coexistence, between national and transnational collective identities, mediated by different information sources. To be sure, a regional ‘Arab’ identity is still strong, as it has coexisted for decades with the nation-building process in each country (Phillips, 2012). However, this identity does not seem to be strongly represented or mediated by transnational pan-Arab channels as before. In fact, despite the fundamental role played by pan-Arab television in the recent past, as Noemi Sakr (2015: 116) pointed out, ‘transnational channels cannot

constitute an alternative to a “national” television system, for practical reasons – that is, they cannot offer detailed coverage of all local news – but also symbolic reasons – that is representing local diversity, culture and perspective’. This appears to be particularly true in times of political transformations.

In conclusion, it seems that the relationship between identity definition and trust in different media sources can offer important insights into the evolving nature of public attitudes in the MENA states and should be further explored. Empirical data can help to understand how perceptions of collective identity, mediated by different information sources, can reflect broader political and social changes. Unfortunately, not all the survey programmes recently carried out in the MENA region can support this kind of exploration. We hope that more surveys will follow the attempt of AT, allowing researchers to expand its results for longitudinal analysis.

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Notes

1. The EU-funded AT project collected data though face-to-face interview in 2014 (with a common questionnaire, translated into Arabic and its local variants) with representative samples of the population in six countries of the Middle East and North Africa: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia (for a summary of the main results see Teti and Abbot, 2018). The sampling strategy involved elements of cluster sampling, stratification and simple random selection or methods designed to simulate it; its precise application varied from country to country, according to local conditions. Despite the possible limits of the use of secondary data, such as the lack of direct control over sample selection and data collection by the authors, we can rely on the quality of the AT data on the basis of the quality control reports provided by the project. In addition to fieldwork monitoring procedures, the quality of the data has been checked after the data collection through missing values analysis, construct validity tests and duplication of records checks. In this study we applied weights to equalise samples. For more information see the Methods Handbook edited by Abbott et al. (2016). After the embargo, the dataset is freely accessible since April 2017 on the project's website (arabtrans.eu).
2. Afro Barometer asks about: radio, newspapers, television, internet, social media; Arab Barometer uses the same list with the exception of social media; WVS adopts a different list: daily newspapers, printed magazines, TV news, radio news, mobile phone, email, internet, talk with friends and colleagues.
3. In 2014 46.2% of Jordanians (compared with 56.8% of Moroccans and 46.16% of Tunisians) were using the internet (Abbott et al., 2017; Lomazzi et al., 2017).

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Appendix

Table 5. Sample sizes, age and gender distributions within the samples by country.

	Sample Size	Age (%)			Sex (%)	
	n	18-35	36-55	56+	Male	Female
Jordan	2139	42.9	39.1	18.8	50.3	49.7
Morocco	1777	56.2	34.8	9.8	49.9	50.1
Tunisia	1215	41.4	34.8	23.8	50.3	49.7

Table 6. Type of settlement and educational level distributions within the samples by country.

	Settlement (%)		Education (%)			
	Urban	Rural	None/elementary	Basic	Secondary	Higher
Jordan	77.1	22.9	12.9	22.4	48.2	16.5
Morocco	60.2	39.8	25.9	14.2	30.8	29.0
Tunisia	64.4	35.6	31.1	11.9	36.3	20.7

Table 7. Main source of political information: original question from ATs and non-response rate by country.

59a. Please, tell me, what are the main sources of political information for you? [several options are possible] 59b. And which sources of information do you trust most? [several options are possible]		59a. Main Sources (4)	59b. Trusted sources (4)
1	Government newspapers	1	1
2	Private national newspapers	2	2
3	International newspapers	3	3
4	Government TV	4	4
5	Private national TV	5	5
6	International TV	6	6
7	Government radio	7	7
8	Private national radio	8	8
9	International radio	9	9
10	Internet	10	10
11	Email	11	11
12	Text messages	12	12
13	Social media	13	13
14	Friends and colleagues	14	14
15	Public places (mosque, market)	15	15
16	Word of mouth (gossip, rumours)	16	16
17	Other (specify)	17	17
98	Don't know (do not read)	98	98
99	Refuse to answer (do not read)	99	99
Non-response rate in Morocco		2.9%	4.6%
Non-response rate in Tunisia		4.0%	9.3%
Non-response rate in Jordan		3.4%	0.7%

ATs: Arab Transformations.

Table 8. Self-definition of identity: original question from ATs and non-response rate by country.

Q28. If you have been asked to identify yourself, with which of the following do you most closely identify yourself?	1. Your country of origin 2. Arab (ethnicity) 3. Muslim (religion) 4. Region 5. Local community, city where I live 6. Others 98. Don't know (do not read)
Non-response rate in Morocco	1.5%
Non-response rate in Tunisia	3.3%
Non-response rate in Jordan	0.1%

ATs: Arab Transformations.